



Pick Your Path to Health

Diabetes in Asians

Did you know that diabetes is the fifth leading cause of death for Asian and Pacific Islander Americans aged 45 to 64? [*Diabetes and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders*, National Diabetes Education Program, NIH] Did you know that being overweight, having high blood pressure, or being physically inactive can increase your risk for developing diabetes? [*Facts About Diabetes for Asian and Pacific Islander Americans*, University of Washington]

When it comes to diabetes, what you know can help save your life.

Diabetes affects more than 16 million people in the United State and it is the main cause of kidney failure, amputations of the foot and leg, adult blindness, and a major cause of heart disease and stroke. [DPP] Death due to diabetes is about three times higher for Asian and Pacific Islander Americans than whites. [*Burden of Chronic Diseases*, by State-Hawaii]

What is diabetes?

Diabetes happens when there is too much sugar in your blood. Normally, when we eat, food is converted to sugar, which enters the bloodstream to help fuel the body's cells. With diabetes, the sugar is not used properly and it builds up in the blood. In time, this sugar buildup can damage the heart, kidneys, eyes, nerves, and blood vessels. [Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP)]

Type 2 diabetes makes up about 95 percent of all diabetes cases. It is more common in adults over age 40 and is strongly associated with obesity, physical inactivity, family history of diabetes, and racial or ethnic background. [DPP]

What you don't know can hurt you

Many people have diabetes and don't know it. In a University of Washington study, 23 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans were found to have diabetes and not know it. The study found that 17 percent Chinese, 23 percent Japanese, 25 percent Filipino, and 28 percent Korean Americans did not know they had diabetes. [*May 1999 (spotlight) Feature*, University of Washington]

According to the National Diabetes Education program, the chances of Asian Americans developing diabetes have increased as their food choices have changed. Instead of their traditional plant- and fish-based diets, they are choosing foods with more animal proteins and fats, and more processed carbohydrates. In addition, they have become less physically active.

Diabetes may seem like a silent disease, but there are some signs to look for such as: unusual thirst, urinating often, feeling very tired or ill, losing weight without trying, having sores that are slow to heal, and having blurry eyesight. [*Diabetes and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders*, National Diabetes Education Program, NIH]

A history of high blood pressure, heart attack, and family history of diabetes are early indicators, says Dr. Wilfred Fujimoto, a leading diabetes researcher at the University of Washington. "Asians are at a greater risk if a parent, brother, or sister has a history of diabetes, more so, if both parents have it. It's important to tell your family members if you have the disease so that they can take steps to prevent it."

How to prevent diabetes

Risk factors for diabetes include:

- Older age
- Family history of diabetes in a parent, sibling, or child
- Overweight, especially if more than 20 percent overweight, or having the "apple" rather than the "pear" pattern of fat distribution
- Diabetes during pregnancy known as gestational diabetes or delivering a baby weighing more than 9 pounds
- High blood pressure
- Not exercising
- Eating too much animal (saturated) fat

[*Facts About Diabetes for Asian and Pacific Islander Americans*, University of Washington]

You can reduce your risk for diabetes. A recent study by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) found that lifestyle changes can reduce the risk of getting diabetes in both men and women. Participants in the Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP) study reduced their risk of getting type 2 diabetes by 58 percent simply by doing physical activity 30 minutes each day and by adopting a low-fat diet.

You can choose simple physical activity that fits into your daily routine. For example, most participants in the DPP study chose walking as their exercise of choice and lost 7 percent-or 15 pounds-of their body weight. You can also follow the Asian traditional diet, which is low in saturated fat and high in complex carbohydrates. [*HealthBeat*, University of Washington]

Getting to know your BMI can also help.

People with a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or greater are at five times higher risk of diabetes than people with a BMI of 25 or less. [Diabetes Prevention Program].

To calculate your BMI, visit the NIH Web site at <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/> or do it with a calculator. Multiply your weight by 703 and then divide your answer by your height in inches multiplied by your height in inches. "A BMI of 25 or more is considered overweight," says Dr. Fujimoto. "For Asians, a normal BMI should be about 23, because the risk of disease increases at a BMI of 23."

The lifestyle changes recommended to avoid diabetes are simple and doable. Start today. Prevent diabetes before it happens to you. It will help keep you on a path to better health.

- Talk to your doctor about your risk for diabetes.
- To learn more about how to prevent diabetes, visit the National Diabetes Education Program at <http://ndep.nih.gov> or call toll-free 1-800-860-8747.
- The University of Washington offers complimentary labels to paste on your medical chart to advise your health care provider that you are from an ethnic group with high risk for diabetes and that you should have your blood sugar tested annually. You can order a label for yourself and each of your family members by calling (206) 543-5597 or e-mail your request to jacds@u.washington.edu.

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."